

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT ANNOUNCES NEW WEB FEATURE TO AID  
CIVICS EDUCATION**

In conjunction with the commemoration of Law Day, the Illinois Supreme Court has announced a new feature on its website to help increase awareness about how Illinois government operates, and the interrelationship among the three branches.

The materials, available on the website at a new “Student Learning Center” are designed for middle school pupils, but are relevant to anyone wishing to learn about Illinois government and its history. The materials utilize an animated character named “Gavy.”

The idea for the materials was brought to the Court by Justices Rita B. Garman and Anne M. Burke after they had discussions with Retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor about the general lack or poor quality of civics education in the nation’s schools.

Since her retirement January 31, 2006, the Justice instituted the Sandra Day O’Connor Project on the State of the Judiciary, which includes a nationwide effort to address what project officials describe as the “evident crisis in civics education” in the nation’s schools.

Justice O’Connor addressed the issue at a conference in April 2007 at Loyola University School of Law, attended by several justices of the Illinois Supreme Court. Justices Garman and Burke also spoke to Justice O’Connor about the need for improved civics education at an October 2006 dinner in the Governor’s Mansion, sponsored by the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation and the Illinois State Bar Association. The dinner honored the contributions of women in the judiciary including those of Justice O’Connor, Illinois Justices Garman and Burke and Retired Illinois Chief Justice Mary Ann G. McMorrow.

“The Supreme Court is very pleased to announce this initiative in conjunction with Law Day on May 1,” said Chief Justice Robert R. Thomas. “Fifty years ago, President Eisenhower proclaimed Law Day as a way to celebrate and strengthen our great heritage of liberty, justice and equality under the law.

“We are very indebted to Justice Sandra Day O’Connor for sharing her ideas on this subject, and to our colleagues, Justice Garman and Justice Burke, for seeing through this initiative. We intend it as a beginning to help make all of us aware of the need to educate our young citizens in the traditions of our representative democracy.”

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## **Gavy Release Add One**

Justice Charles E. Freeman, the most senior member on the Illinois Supreme Court, echoed the sentiments of Chief Justice Thomas, and was particularly enthused about the Court's use of the internet to provide informational and educational resources to young people.

"It is important," he noted, "that the Court is delivering information and knowledge using the latest technical initiatives."

Justice Thomas R. Fitzgerald also heralded the introduction of the program.

"Along with my colleagues on the Court, I am delighted at the implementation of the Gavy program," said Justice Fitzgerald. "It is essential to a free society that its citizens understand the workings of its government and the rights that protect them. This is a worthwhile endeavor to accomplish that purpose."

The education materials are available on the website by clicking on the "Student Learning Center" of Illinois Courts at [www.state.il.us/court](http://www.state.il.us/court) .

The Web-based materials consist of seven lessons plus a quiz. Visitors to the "Student Learning Center" are guided by an animated character, "Gavy," depicted by a humanoid form of a judge's gavel. The lessons cover the U.S. Constitution, the Illinois Constitution; the three branches of Illinois government; how laws are made in Illinois; voting in Illinois; the election process; and local government.

"Knowledgeable participation in government is a hallmark of our democratic principles and traditions," said Justice Thomas L. Kilbride. "With the introduction of Gavy, we hope to provide a useful interactive tool for a better understanding of the underpinnings of our freedoms."

Justice Garman recalled the surprise she felt in talking to Justice O'Connor about the need for improved civics education.

"When I learned from Justice O'Connor that more people could name the Three Stooges than the three branches of government, I knew it was imperative that we devise an educational vehicle to engender interest in our system of government," said Justice Garman. "I am very pleased with the development of Gavy. Utilizing this educational information, students can and are encouraged to learn more of our system of government."

The materials also contain Illinois state symbols ranging from the "Tully Monster" which is the state fossil to the Painted Turtle as the state reptile. The site contains memory puzzles and an electronically graded Illinois government and constitution quiz.

"Good government is possible only when people understand how government works," said Justice Lloyd A. Karmeier. "We hope the information provided by this new program will help students and others to become more engaged as citizens and more informed about the institutions which affect their lives."

**MORE**

**Gavy Release  
Add Two**

“By introducing Gavy, the Court envisions that the program will help students learn how to develop a greater understanding and importance about the rule of law and the fundamentals of freedom of speech, assembly and media in our community,” said Justice Burke. “The initiative for this program, of course, came from Justice O’Connor, and her passionate activism to expand students’ knowledge of their rights under our constitution is to be very much applauded.”

The Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, which assists the Supreme Court in administering the state’s judicial branch, developed the materials through its Internet Services Group, a team under the authority of Skip Robertson, Assistant Director of the Administrative Office’s Judicial Management Information Services Division.

The inclusion of the educational materials continues a pattern of improving the Supreme Court’s web site. In March, the Court began posting video and audio of its oral arguments; and in October 2006, the Court completely revamped the web site to make it easier to locate the most popular information and to introduce several new features to aid the public, educators and members of the legal profession.

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